

# **CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR MICHIGAN STATE PARKS**

Wednesday, March 28, 2007  
Proud Lake Recreation Area  
Commerce Township, MI

## ***MINUTES***

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Murdock Jemerson, Chair  
James Bradley  
Betsy Clark  
Michael McDonald  
Robert Hoffmeyer  
Charles Nelson  
Mary Pitcher  
William Rose  
Todd Scott  
Christopher Graham

### **MEMBERS ABSENT**

Tom Ferguson, Vice Chair  
Tom Bailey  
Rev. Hurley Coleman, Jr.  
Kathy Lewand  
James Hendricks  
Janet Howard Washington  
Sam Washington

### **EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT**

Sandra Clark  
Duncan Wyeth

### **EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT**

Mary Brown  
Curtis Hertel  
Donna Stine

### **DNR STAFF PRESENT**

Director Rebecca Humphries  
Dennis Fox, Chief of Staff  
Dennis Fedewa, Chief Deputy  
Ron Olson, Chief, Parks and Recreation  
George Cameron  
Harold Herta  
Vicki Anthes  
Tony Herek  
Yolanda Taylor  
Paul Yauk

### **INTRODUCTIONS**

**Murdock Jemerson, Chair**, called the meeting to order at 12:45 pm with roll call and an overview of the meeting agenda.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Department of Natural Resources Director Rebecca A. Humphries** gave a presentation on the status of the Department's budget and the shortfalls that the Department is facing with its restricted Game and Fish, Forest Development, Park Improvement and Park Endowment funds. She commented that revenues have been declining and gave an overview of the fund balances this year compared to last year, and the projected forecast for the next fiscal year, and beyond. She gave an overview of some of the Department's challenges, such as disease and non-native species, conflicting uses of public lands, infrastructure deterioration, recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers, etc. She also mentioned that the last license fee package went into effect in 1996, and if this package does not pass the legislature, the Department is facing an \$8 million shortfall.

**Dennis Fox, Chief of Staff**, also gave a presentation on the hunting and fishing license fee package proposal. He gave an overview of the Department's restricted funds and the Department's funding sources, indicating 76% of the budget is from restricted funds, 15% is from federal matching funds, and only 9% is general tax dollars (General Fund), compared to 23% ten years ago. Half of general tax dollars received are paid to local governments and only the remaining half is applied for conservation. The Department receives less than one-third of one cent of every dollar from the state's general tax dollars.

He also presented information regarding funding cuts that the Department had to implement because of declining revenues and fund balances, and the effects on numerous Department programs over the past 3 years, and the threats to conservation and Michigan's economy if an increase in license fees is not passed by the legislature. The Department is taking a proactive approach to promoting more interest in outdoor recreation through youth programs, conducting workshops to educate the public on the hunting and fishing license fee package proposal and what conservation efforts their license fees support, and looking at alternatives to generate more revenue.

He mentioned that a Conservation Summit was held on February 7, with a wide range of conservational interest groups (approximately 200 people) in attendance, including members of this Committee. Three primary groups have affirmed their commitment to take the lead in finding long-term, sustainable funding for conservation, namely the Michigan United Conservation Corps, the Michigan Environmental Council, and the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy.

**Todd Scott** mentioned that he heard gas tax legislation is being crafted or has been introduced to change the gas tax. The Director responded that the Department is not involved or a part of this legislation.

**Chair Jemerson** commented that the Finance Subcommittee met and **Chris Graham** gave a nice overview of what occurred at the Conservation Summit. He mentioned that there are some very intriguing yet complicated issues related to conservation and environmental issues. He asked the Director what this Committee could do to assist in these efforts. The Director responded that this Committee could craft solutions for long-term stable funding for conservation, stay plugged in and get the message across to everybody that has an investment

and an interest in the future of this state's conservation. Chair Jemerson asked all committee members to submit any creative ideas to Chris Graham.

**Mary Pitcher** commended the Director and Dennis Fox on their presentations and asked if the Department has any plans to get out to the public more. The Director mentioned that staff has conducted workshops to educate the public about the Department's shortfalls in its restricted funds and the license fee package, as well as reaching out to rotary clubs and other public organizations. The Department is at other options, such as a gift certificate program and military discounts.

Legislation is in the process of being introduced to address the hunting and fishing license fee increases. Senator Liz Brater is working on the fishing license portion and either Representative Sheltrown or Representative Gillard is working on introducing legislation to address the hunting license portion of the fee increases.

Discussions continued regarding mechanisms to track users, partnering with other organizations or interest groups, and ideas to attract more users and generate more revenues.

**Chair Jemerson** thanked the Director and Dennis Fox for taking the time to attend this meeting and present this information to this Committee.

#### **ADOPTION OF MINUTES – January, 2007**

**Chair Jemerson** motioned to approve the January, 2007 Minutes; **Betsy Clark** seconded the motion, the motion carried and the January 2007 Minutes were approved and adopted.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTARY**

Dee Pasquantonio, Proud Lake Trail Riders, asked what happens with the camping fees. **Ron Olson, DNR Parks and Recreation Chief**, responded that they go into the park improvement fund, which is a restricted fund that is used towards park operations, maintenance, improvements and the acquisition of parks and recreation lands. Ms. Pasquantonio commented that the Proud Lake Trail Riders have asked for rustic equestrian camping at the Proud Lake Recreation Area and Fort Custer, and gathered 650 signatures in support of equestrian campsites. They feel that this would generate more revenue if the Department were willing to incorporate equestrian camping into their southern parks and recreation areas, as the majority of horse riders are from the Oakland County area or adjacent states. She mentioned that 5 members of the Proud Lake Trail Riders were present, along with 4 other members of equestrian and friends groups from Maybury and Highland. The Proud Lake Trail Riders take care of the trails and the staging areas at Proud Lake, to include maintenance, trash removal, mowing, etc., and would be willing to continue these efforts at no cost to the Department if an equestrian campground was established at the Proud Lake Recreation Area.

Further comments were received from other members of the friends groups, further supporting their request for a centrally located equestrian trail that would connect to the Highland Recreation Area and Kensington Park.

**Luba Sitar, DNR Parks and Recreation's Pontiac District Supervisor**, commented that they have established a regional planning committee to look into this proposal. Ron Olson further commented that a huge meeting was held last year that resulted in the development of this committee and it is something that the Parks and Recreation Division is interested in doing, especially since the friends groups are so willing to step forward and help manage such a campground.

**Chris Graham** commented that this Committee took a tour of the Proud Lake Recreation Area, and is interested in this group's proposal. However, there are other infrastructure issues that need to be considered, but he does not think an equestrian campground would be a huge financial burden, especially when groups such as these are willing to help.

**Merle Richmond**, equestrian friends group, asked how close are these committees coming to some sort of long-term funding solution so they (citizens/friends groups) can get the word out and how do we get information or minutes on the status of these meetings. **Chuck Nelson** responded that information can be obtained on the Michigan Environmental Council, the Michigan United Conservation Club, or the Heart of the Lakes websites for updates on the progress of the conservation summit. He further commented that the general election is in November, 2008, so something needs to be submitted to the legislature prior to the general election. However, there are a lot of challenges to face, but a variety of things can happen short-term. The Conservation Summit is looking at long-term solutions.

**Mary Pitcher** commented that the time is now to contact legislators regarding the hunting and fishing license fee package. Concerned citizens should contact their legislators now; there is no need to wait for a bill or legislation to be introduced.

**Chris Graham** commented that funding for state government is a much larger issue, with nearly \$2 billion of general fund dollars will be gone by 2008. Cuts in taxes and other income to the state has produced major cuts for the Departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality.

**Robert Golda, Hiking Michigan**, commented that one of the saving graces will be through generating a huge amount of interest with the younger generations to get them outdoors and into the parks to bike, hike, ride horses, camp or indulge in other outdoor recreational activities. Friends groups and organizations are willing to collect and donate money to save these parks and help maintain the trails by doing any type of maintenance work that is necessary. The amount of people present is a very small representation of the thousands of people in southeast Michigan who would be willing to help save the parks. The Department should consider a process where they can utilize these groups without having to go through a long, drawn out approval or management planning process.

**Fred Dore, League of Michigan Byclists**, commented that their organization is a statewide advocacy and safety organization that works closely with the Michigan Mountain Biking Association and Todd Scott (Committee member). He further commented that this park has a significant and unique trail system, with an enormous base of visitors from the metro area. These facilities deserve a lot of attention. If these natural treasures are not maintained, those that generate a lot of revenue for these parks will eventually leave. He further commented that he commends the Department for working with other state organizations regarding long-term funding solutions. However, we are missing the opportunity to collaborate with local businesses and other organizations that promote a healthy lifestyle (i.e. health organizations, insurance companies) and the possibilities this could create, such as employers offering to pay for, or a portion of, an employee's state park permit.

**Debra Brown, Proud Lake Trail Riders**, commented that she personally donated 60 hours of her tractor to trim trails in the park. She suggested that where old buildings need to be torn down, turn those areas into equestrian campsites. At Maybury State Park, there is nothing to generate revenue, except motor vehicle permits. Creating a rustic campground would bring in a lot of revenue.

**Bill Herman, Michigan Mountain Biking Association**, commented that the trails in the Proud Lake Recreation Area are in good shape due to the volunteer groups efforts to keep them in this condition.

**Chair Jemerson** thanked the groups for their comments and assured them that this Committee will consider their recommendations.

### **ACCESS TO RECREATION PRESENTATION**

**Cindy Burkhour, Access to Recreation**, gave a presentation regarding Access to Recreation initiatives, and provided a list of the first round of recipients that are in the final phases of consideration for the Able-to-Play project, which is the design and development of 19 boundless playgrounds. The Kellogg Foundation granted the Parks and Recreation Division \$3 million towards to fund accessibility projects in state parks and recreation areas. As a requirement by the Kellogg Foundation, these dollars are distributed geographically throughout the state. They work with friends groups and organizations, user groups, and potential users. Wells State Park is a good example. The friends group raised \$400,000 towards a playground. Of the 7 parks that have received consideration for funding, they presented what development improvements they intend to focus on, such as overall park linkages and accessibility routes, fishing, beach and swimming areas, incorporation of play elements into existing ramp structures and picnic opportunities,

**Dan Lord, Parks and Recreation Access to Recreation Coordinator**, presented the focus of accessibility development projects within the 7 state parks and recreation areas. Staff is currently working through the Department of Management and Budget process to get some consultants on board to broaden their experiences to the local communities. Local sources identified today will enhance outreach efforts. The Kellogg Foundation grant is gaining interest,

and that interest can be used towards further accessibility equipment or accessibility-type projects or improvements. He further commented that accessibility is now being phased into the design, construction, or improvement process for all state parks, recreation areas, and facilities.

Dan further commented that the Michigan State Parks Foundation is in the process of being reestablished. Considerations are being made to house a state park endowment fund within the State Parks Foundation to give people an opportunity to donate money for ongoing park and accessibility improvements. The Kellogg Foundation is one of the top 5 foundations in the world. The grant to the Parks and Recreation Division is just a small portion, and is a pilot, ground breaking opportunity for ideas. Michigan's Parks and Recreation Division is setting the stage for this state to create a theme and open the doors to future discussions and possibilities.

A new Access to Recreation Advisory group was recently established to help the department on all accessibility issues, to include its website and how to provide information to the disabled.

**Jim Bradley** commented that there is a disabled skiing program at Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park for the ski trails, and offered to pass along the instructor's name to Cindy Burkhour and Dan Lord for future consideration.

**Duncan Wyeth** also commented that Public Policy Associates completed a study about 3 years ago, and almost 32% of all families in this state have an immediate family member that is disabled. Families have to consider their destinations to determine if those facilities/sites will accommodate all of their family members. He further commented that the baby boomer generation projection is that by the year 2050, at least 50% of people age 65 or older will develop a disability that will impact their accessibility and recreational opportunities. We should make Michigan the first state of choice where people can travel with their entire family.

**Chuck Nelson** commented that this has to be a way of doing business, not the exception. The Department cannot afford to maintain two sets of facilities, so when we look at future sites and development, we have to be able to maintain one facility that will accommodate all users.

**Duncan Wyeth** further commented that universal design takes a lot of consideration and education, it is not something that is being taught in most universities or most architectural design courses. We not only have to consider existing disabled citizens, but we also need to remember that existing senior citizens will eventual develop a disability, as well as veterans returning from war that that have either been injured or disabled. This is nothing new, but something that has to be realized.

## **DNR NAMING POLICIES**

**Dennis Fedewa, Chief Deputy**, gave an update on the status of the draft naming policies. He presented the same draft policies to several other boards and committees, and this is the second round of presentations. He presented the current, revised draft of the naming policies to the committee. The first policy was changed to include a 25-year cap, for decision and consideration

of the Natural Resources Commission. The second policy has not changed much, except to include the Forest Advisory Committee in the review process as it became abundantly clear that they have a valuable asset that they are trying to protect and promote as well.

This is the second round of presentations to various boards and committees. They will be going back to the Waterways Commission and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board, prior to presenting them to the Natural Resources Commission for final approval and adoption, hopefully in June.

**Chris Graham** commented that the improvements are much better. Having separate policies and a 25-year cap makes sense.

**Chuck Nelson** commented that these policies are not retroactive. Anything that has been previously named will remain as is, but it does not alleviate the acceptance of another offer.

Questions were raised and discussions continued regarding the policies, such as the rules of accounting, soliciting partnerships (i.e. offers to publish a brochure), endowments, revocation of names, and the public hearing process.

After addressing the questions, Dennis asked the Committee to review these policies to determine if they concur with these changes, and to submit any final input and support in moving these policies forward.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION UPDATES**

### **Parks and Recreation Strategic Planning**

**Vicki Anthes**, Parks and Recreation's Planning Section Chief, gave an update on the Parks and Recreation Strategic planning. So far, 3 public meetings have been held to give the public the opportunity to provide input. Participation was terrific, and the public was very forthcoming with their input. There were many visitors from non-motorized trail groups. They are also conducting outreach efforts in other ways, through radio interviews, the E-Newsletter, and press releases, and are looking into collaborating with MUCC to place information on their website and the Michigan Recreational Boating Information System. Two more public meetings are scheduled in the St. Ignace and Marquette.

On April 25 and 26, a "visioning" workshop is planned at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center for members of this Committee, the Michigan State Waterways Commission, and varying stakeholders.

**Chuck Nelson** commented that results from this visioning workshop would help determine recommendations. There is not an enormous amount of controversy from boaters or the public right now. However, participation in this workshop is vital to moving forward to the next step of making recommendations. Participation is vital and strongly encouraged.

Vicki Anthes commented that this is going to be an intensive workshop and details will be forthcoming. Following this April workshop, it may be beneficial for this Committee and the Michigan State Waterways Commission to meet again to work together and really digest the outcome of the April workshop. She suggested moving this Committee's regular meeting to June 13, so that a joint strategic planning session can be scheduled on the 14<sup>th</sup>, just prior to the Waterways Commission's meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

All Committee members present agreed to move the next regular meeting of this Committee to June 13.

### **Lodging Update**

**George Cameron**, Parks and Recreation's Chief of Field Operations, gave a presentation on the new lodging opportunities that are available in certain state parks and recreation areas, to include camper cabins, yurts, teepees and lodges. These new lodging facilities were distributed geographically throughout the state. There are currently 16 additional fully accessible camper cabins being constructed, which should be completed by the end of the year and distributed geographically throughout the state. Diseased ash lumber was utilized for the building materials.

Several questions were raised about these new lodging opportunities and distribution to certain locations. George responded that considerations will be made for more yurts and camper cabins and more distribution throughout southeast Michigan.

### **MVP and Camping Reservations**

Harold Herta gave a brief overview of the motor vehicle permit sales and camping reservations to date.

### **Infrastructure and Operations Funding Status**

A handout was provided to the Committee regarding information about the budget dilemma and the need for infrastructure improvements. This document was prepared, and presented, to the Governor in response to her request for information regarding Parks and Recreation's needs for infrastructure improvements. It identified specific areas, by counties, that have a need for infrastructure improvements. It can also be used as talking points for Committee members when speaking to the needs of the parks and recreation system. Dams are also important but were not included in this document until it can be determined how much costs will be involved.

### **House Appropriations and Committee Presentations**

**Ron Olson** gave a brief overview of the presentations he has made to the house and senate appropriations committees regarding the state parks and recreation system. He mentioned that a member of the house appropriations committee commented that it is great how the Parks and Recreation Division is stepping up and becoming entrepreneurs to generate their own revenue and cost savings.



## **Chief's Challenges**

Due to time constraints, it was decided that this agenda item will be held over for a future meeting.

## **Legislative Updates**

**Harold Herta** gave a brief overview of 4 bills that are pending in the legislature that affect the state parks and recreation system, such as bills to create a gift certificate program, an outdoor fitness award program, and considerations for members of the military and their families.

**Chuck Nelson** commented on the veteran's bill. He mentioned that the Department's senior citizen discounts costs the Department approximately \$3 million each year and do not receive general fund assistance to cover this expense. Although a worthy program, it costs other taxpayers to cover these expenses.

## **Land Issues Report**

**Paul Yauk**, Parks and Recreation's Land Liaison, gave a brief update on parks and recreation related land transactions. He mentioned that the next round of land consolidation reviews for 6 counties are scheduled to begin in mid-April, and also gave a brief overview of the land acquisition proposals before the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board.

The Committee asked that a list of all land transactions be provided to this Committee at the next meeting, to include any controversial, high profile, or other transactions of interest.

## **SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Fee/Short-Term Finance**

No report.

### **Long-Term Finance**

**Chris Graham** reported on the Conservation Summit, and commented that this group is working diligently on options and contacting legislators, but are waiting to see what the Governor and the Legislature decide on the service tax. However, getting support for taxes is difficult. In the meantime, this group is looking at other options or mechanisms to help fund conservation efforts, as well as contacting legislators and fellow environmental/conservation groups to inform them that this is a major crisis and asking for their ideas and support.

The next conservation coalition meeting is scheduled for April 9 at 2:00 pm at the MUCC office in Lansing.

**Chuck Nelson** commented that this committee should also get involved and look at some other opportunities for getting involved. He has asked that the Chair of this committee play a regular role in this effort.

### **Marketing and Interpretation**

No report.

### **Programming and Operations**

**Betsy Clark** reported that Lakeport State Park would like to do a pilot project by installing coin-operated showers, with a token option, to conserve energy. Their proposal states they could save approximately 4% on water consumption. With the problems they have had in the past with incidences of children going into the showers and letting them run, this proposal would require a token to operate the shower. Therefore, they are asking for this committee's approval to move forward with this pilot project.

The Committee approved of this pilot program and asked that the minutes reflect that they are in support of this pilot program and that the Lakeport State Park staff did a wonderful job in coming up with this idea and developing this proposal.

Ron Olson cautioned that staff should ensure that excellent, well-tested mechanisms are installed so the showers will not shut off or malfunction during a shower.

Betsy Clark further reported that a proposal from Carl Osentoski with the Huron County Economic Development Authority, brought forth a proposal for lodging opportunities in Port Crescent State Park. They propose that, if approved by this Committee, they would move forward with a study to determine the feasibility of building a lodge within Port Crescent State Park. The park would not be responsible for managing the lodge. He has asked to come to our next meeting to present and discuss this proposal.

**Chuck Nelson** commented that we need to make sure there is a converter clause as a lot of times proposals and agreements are made to maintain this sort of a facility, but then the responsible parties walk away and the costs of maintaining or removing the facility lies with the department.

**George Cameron** commented that, at this time, they are only asking for this Committee's approval to move forward with a feasibility study.

**Mike McDonald** commented that he could not see this Committee supporting a feasibility study on just this lodging opportunity in Port Crescent State Park. The feasibility study should include their own county parks on the same lake and the effects on the community and tourism. He asked that department staff notify them that they should consider including this in their own feasibility study.

Chair Jemerson commented that he was concerned as to whether or not they will be coming up with a business plan, to include a revenue stream. The proposal is not real clear or well developed, and asks that they come to the next meeting to present this proposal in more detail.

The Committee agreed that Mr. Osentoski should come to the next meeting to present this idea/concept in more detail, and asked that department staff work with Mr. Osentoski to arrange this and notify him that they will be interested in more detail.

### **Stewardship and Planning**

Both subcommittee chairs were not available, but one of the subcommittee members reported that this subcommittee did meet recently and will send out the minutes of their recent meeting to this Committee.

### **ELECTION OF COMMITTEE SECRETARY**

The committee moved to elect the Committee Secretary; Todd Scott nominated Betsy Clark; Mike McDonald supported the nomination; Mary Pitcher seconded the nomination; and it was unanimously agreed that Betsy Clark would continue as the Committee's Secretary.

### **MAY MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks will be held on June 13 in Sault Ste. Marie. Committee members will be notified of the meeting time(s) and location.

### **ADJOURN**

**Chair Jemerson** motioned to adjourn the meeting; Todd Scott supported the motion; Betsy Clark seconded the motion; and the meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.